

[DRAFT]

**DEMOCRACY PREPSM BLACKSTONE VALLEY,
A RHODE ISLAND MAYORAL ACADEMYSM**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MINUTES

4 p.m., April 5, 2010

Town Council Chambers, Cumberland Town Hall

45 Broad Street, Cumberland

Mayor McKee called the meeting to order at 4:15 p.m. Present were:

Mayor Daniel J. McKee (Chair)
Administrator T. Joseph Almond
Mayor James E. Doyle
Mayor Charles D. Moreau

Also present were Elsa Duré, Chiu Heng, and Daniel C. Waugh.

Minutes of January 27, 2010

Mr. Waugh announced that the minutes of the January 27, 2010 had not yet been prepared. Accordingly, this item was deferred.

Chair's Report

The Chair reported that the Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM (RIMA) has entered into a letter of intent to purchase the St. Patrick's School for the Mayoral AcademySM's use. Design work is being performed by Torrado, and a contractor is ready to go. The cost of the project has risen in order to comply with regulations of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE). Compliance with those regulations is necessary in order to qualify for state reimbursement of 30% the cost of school housing. As an example, the window shades that the architect had recommended would cost about \$25,000, while the ones that comply with the RIDE regulations cost \$93,000. As a result of this sort of increase in item after item, the cost of the rehabilitation has risen to about \$3,000,000, which is in addition to the \$650,000 cost of acquisition and about \$300,000 in "soft" costs including environmental remediation. The cost increases required RIMA to renegotiate with the bridge loan financier, RAZA Development. RAZA will finance up to 90% of the projected value of the project, which has appraised to \$3,650,000, or about \$3.3 million of financing. The extra gap has been raised through RIMA fundraising.

Despite these problems, the Chair predicted that everything will come together to work. RIMA is now ready to sign the purchase and sale agreement.

Report from Head of School

Mr. Chiappetta noted that school attendance both by staff and students is good, but in the case of students, the 94% attendance rate is below target. The staff is trying to devise motivations and incentives to improve the student attendance rate. Scholars are well on track to meet the year-end academic targets. The STEP literacy assessment shows growth that, at the beginning of the year, 82% of the scholars came in at a below-basic literacy level. As of one month ago, 92% were able to read at a first grade level, which is the Academy's year-end benchmark. This demonstrates that, from a literacy perspective, more time with great teachers is paying off incredibly well. Furthermore, these signs of academic growth are consistent across the student spectrum, whether as to starting evaluation, ethnicity, or poverty. The only identifiable group that is lagging to a degree relative to the overall student population is boys. The staff is now endeavoring to address this discrepancy.

The Academy is also monitoring family satisfaction. 73 out of the 76 families having students at the school responded to the family satisfaction survey. The preliminary results show that families are very satisfied with the Academy.

Four families have withdrawn since the beginning of the school year. Two of these families moved out of district. One family withdrew from the Mayoral AcademySM's full-day program in favor of a half-day program. The other family's child transferred to a private school. The four scholars have been replaced with students from the waiting list.

In response to a question, Mr. Chiappetta indicated that he would provide attendance data by community at a future board meeting.

Treasurer's Report

A conservative projection shows that the academy will end the year in the black by about \$31,000. To accomplish this goal, the academy has deferred certain purchases until it is certain that the corresponding revenues will be received. As of April 1, the academy's staff expanded to include Chiu Heng, a technology specialist who now serves as regional director for technology development and who previously worked for the Providence Schools.

One budget item for which Mr. Chiappetta is especially proud is the projected overspending on books. The scholars have advanced to the degree that the school must now buy books for students reading at the second grade level. While at the beginning of the year, the school had only kindergarten texts, it later developed the need for first grade texts, and now second grade texts.

Another item where the academy will be over budget is the cost of assessment and scoring materials. The projected cost is now \$15,000 versus the budgeted cost of \$1,100. To a degree, however, these higher than expected costs have been offset by less-than-budgeted spending on computer hardware and software.

All tuition invoices are now being timely paid by the community school superintendents.

The Mayoral AcademySM has been able to operate a great school for an amount between \$10,000 and \$11,500 per pupil per year.

The budget does not show any cost of transportation because the cost of transporting Cumberland students is being picked up by the Town of Cumberland, while the cost of transporting students from the other districts is being picked up by the Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM. The budget also does not show any cost for rent, as that expense is also being paid by the Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM.

The Chair responded by noting that Democracy PrepSM Blackstone Valley, a Rhode Island Mayoral AcademySM is the only public school in the state whose transportation costs are not picked up by the sending district's budget. Furthermore, the charter schools must pay their housing costs from their operational budgets while district schools have their housing costs paid outside the district's operations budget.

Lottery Update

Ms. Lopes reminded board members that their Ethics Commission financial disclosure reports are due by April 30 and should list Democracy PrepSM Blackstone Valley, a Rhode Island Mayoral AcademySM as one of the nonprofits they are connected to.

The two lottery dates are Wednesday April 28 for the kindergarten and first grade and Wednesday May 13 for the middle school. Both lotteries will be held at Fatima Hall. As of April 2, 460 applications had been received for 176 spots. Open houses have been held which more than 500 parents attended. Aggressive canvassing is about to start. In the coming week, Democracy PrepSM Blackstone Valley, a Rhode Island Mayoral AcademySM parents will be canvassing. Teach for America students will also be assisting the academy and the Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM to canvass in the four communities. Ms. Lopes also expects some Americorps volunteers to help canvass.

(Mr. Magee and Mr. Allsopp appeared.)

Mr. Magee mentioned that, in some communities, applications were being submitted for as many as one-quarter of the age-eligible children.

Executive Session (Potential acquisition of real estate)

The Chair (seconded by Mr. Doyle) moved to go into executive session to discuss the potential acquisition of real estate pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-5(a)(5) because advanced public information relating thereto would be detrimental to the interest of the public. AYE: Almond, Doyle, McKee, Moreau. NAY: None.

The Chair declared the meeting closed to the public.

*** EXECUTIVE SESSION ***

The Chair declared the meeting open to the public.

Mr. Almond (seconded by Mr. Moreau) moved to seal the minutes of the executive session. AYE: Almond, Doyle, McKee, Moreau. NAY: None.

Public forum

Jeremiah Kittridge announced that he was a representative of Democracy PrepSM public schools. Seth Andrew had asked to be allowed to participate in the public forum by telephone. Without objection, Mr. Andrew was connected by telephone.

Mr. Andrew was concerned whether the board was aware of the Mayoral AcademySM's long-term facilities needs in light of proposed school growth. Mr. Andrew stressed that the board should be alert to consider facilities opportunities as they arose, particularly unused or underused public school facilities. Contingency plans also need to be developed in the event facilities cannot be developed on time.

Mr. Magee elucidated that part of the charter request submitted on December 1, 2009 was for an expansion of Democracy PrepSM Blackstone Valley, a Rhode Island Mayoral AcademySM to a second campus beginning in the second year. The second campus would include a new kindergarten cohort as well as a second fifth grade cohort. Since submitting the request, DPBV-RIMA has generated sufficient interest to start a second kindergarten and sufficient interest to start one fifth grade class. The opening of what would effectively be a second school will complicate DPBV-RIMA's search for adequate facilities.

RIDE has indicated that it would like to approve the proposed expansion and that approval could come as early as one of the next two Board of Regents' meetings. Furthermore, it believes that the Governor's budget has funding to assist the expansion, at least at the kindergarten level. The expansion funding would be available only if that part of the Governor's budget passes as is. Assuming the funding is available, Mr. Magee felt that opening a second kindergarten is something that could be accomplished both from a facilities perspective and from the perspective of having adequate teaching and leadership staff.

Will the next two-three weeks show that the middle school gets a large number of applicants? Will there be an appetite at RIDE and the General Assembly to fund a second fifth grade. The answers to these questions will influence the decision whether to open a second fifth grade. Even without any additional applications, the number of applications to seats for fifth graders is four-to-one; so if a second fifth grade were opened, there would still be at least two applications for each seat.

Last year, there were few applications from Lincoln. This year, there are (so far) six times as many applicants from Lincoln as last year.

[DRAFT]

Mr. Doyle (seconded by Mr. Moreau) moved to adjourn. AYE: Almond, Doyle, McKee, Moreau. NAY: None. The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Daniel C. Waugh, Secretary

“Democracy Prep”SM is a service mark of Democracy Builders.

“Mayoral Academy”SM is a service mark of Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM.